

February 13, 2005



## Get Up And Get Going

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### Matthew 2:13

Now when [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”

“An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph...” Have any of you ever seen an angel? Do you know what an angel looks like?

Most people think angels recline on snowy, white clouds. Most people think angels wear long white robes. Most people think angels have halos around their heads and wings on their shoulders. And a lot of people think if you see one angel, look out, there just might be a whole multitude of them waiting around the corner; because angels tend to hang together so they can sing soft and beautiful music, accompanied by harps.

That’s what most people think. Maybe you think differently. Maybe when you picture an angel, you see a bumbling sweet old man like that angel second-class who helped Jimmy Stewart realize what a wonderful life this is. Maybe you picture the ruggedly handsome Michael Landon. Or, maybe in a serious case of miss-casting, you picture Della Reese.

My son remembered I collect Christmas decorations. From California, he sent me a little band of Christmas angles. They’re an old set of made-in-Japan china figurines. They are all wearing red choir robes with white lace trim and have gold-tipped wings. They all have little golden halos above their long, blonde hair. One of them is playing an

accordion, a second one has a flute to her lips, and a third is holding a trumpet.

They're sweet. Unfortunately, none of those images is valid. Most of the ideas most people have about angels just aren't valid.

There was a man who called his wife "Angel." When he talked about her, he was always saying, "Angel this..." or "Angel that..." When pressed, he said the reason he called her "Angel" was because she was always up in the air, she never had enough to wear, and she was always harping on something.

I don't think that was fair, neither to his wife nor to the angels.

So, how's a Christian supposed to picture an angel? Certainly in the Gospel of Luke, you can find a whole multitude of them singing songs [Luke 2:13-14]. But in the rest of the Bible, angels seem to be pretty solitary fellows.

That's the first thing to know. My apologies to Della Reese, but in the Bible all the angels are men. You won't find a female angel anywhere. The Hebrew word which is translated as "angel" in the Old Testament means "messenger." That's the most important thing to know: an angel is a messenger. He comes with a message from God. And more important than what he looks like, or the number of wings fluttering on his shoulders, or the size of his halo --- is his message.

If you read the many examples in the scriptures where angels speak, one thing is absolutely clear: those angel voices are not soft, not sweet, and certainly not soothing. The angels come with a message from God that is always stirring, and is amazingly repetitious. Almost without exception, the angels come and say the same thing: "Get up," they say; "Hurry up," they encourage; "Go quickly," they instruct.

It is amazing how often they bring the very same message to God's lethargic people: "Get up and get going!" Apparently God never feels the need to send an angel to tell His people to relax and take it easy. I think we know how to do that for ourselves. When the angels come, they come with God's most urgent message: "Get up and get going!"

If you don't believe me, just listen to a few examples from the pages of scripture.

1. In the book of Judges you will find the story of Gideon. Back then, the nation of Israel was in trouble, an invasion by a mighty foreign

army was imminent; but nobody was doing anything about it. So, God sent an angel to Gideon. The angel said, “Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian...” [Judges 6:14]

2. In the First book of Kings, you will discover the time when the prophet Elijah was discouraged and afraid. He was so depressed, he ran away and hid out in a cave. He was ready to give up and die. That’s when God sent an angel to Elijah. The angel said, “Arise and eat...” [I Kings 19:5]

3. In the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matthew, on Resurrection Morning, there is the story of the women going to the tomb, finding it empty, and seeing an angel sitting in Jesus’ place. The angel told them what had happened, and he ended his message with these words: “Go quickly and tell his disciples that [Jesus] has risen from the dead...” [Matthew 28:7]

4. In the Acts of the Apostles, you find the time when Simon Peter was in jail. It was night time when suddenly the jail walls collapsed. Simon didn’t know what to do. He just stayed in bed until an angel appeared. The angel said, “Get up quickly... and follow me.” [Acts 12:7-8]

5. Later on in the Acts of the Apostles you will find the story of Philip. Philip was busy preaching the gospel of Christ to his fellow Jews when an angel said to him, “Rise and go toward the south... go up and join this chariot.” [Acts 8:26-29] And through Philip’s obedience, the message of Christ was extended beyond the Jews to all people throughout the world.

6. And in today’s scripture, just after the birth of the baby Jesus, an angel came to Joseph and said, “Rise... take the child... and flee...” [Matthew 2:13]

I hope you can see the pattern developing there. Those angel voices were not soft as velvet; they were raspy as sandpaper, and they all had the same message: “Get up and get going!”

I think that’s a message we all need to hear. Instead of getting up and getting going, we tend to want to sit down and take it easy.

The angel says, “Get up...” You need to hear that in your personal life, because you get too comfortable too quickly.

You settle in to an old routine, and nobody seems to call you to account for it.

You think nobody's measuring you, nobody's keep score, nobody's keeping track.

And if you're not careful, your life just slows down and becomes stagnant. Personal growth becomes a thing of the past.

But the angel tells you to "keep moving." You can't be satisfied with the way things are. The scripture puts it this way: "Here and now, dear friends, we are God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed..." [I John 3:2]

No, you're not done, yet. You've got to keep moving forward, keep being open to change, keep improving yourself.

Look at where you are right now: in your personal faith, in your spiritual life, in your marriage, in your parenting skills, on the job. Maybe you're situation has grown stale and lifeless. What you need is to get up and get going. In the words of the angels, an effective Christian life tells you: don't be satisfied with leaning back where you are. Get up and get going to improve your situation.

The angels bring the very same message to this church. One of the greatest dangers a church faces is being satisfied with words.

When William Henry Harrison, our ninth president, was inaugurated in March of 1840; he had prepared a nine thousand word inaugural address. He wrote it himself. Back then, the president didn't have speech writers and TelePrompTers. The president had to do it all himself.

The weather in our nation's capital that March morning was not good. It was a dismal day, cold and wet. But when old Tippicanoe stood up to speak; he was so proud of the speech he had written, he stubbornly spent two hours delivering every single one of his nine thousand personally written words.

Today, nobody remembers what he said. But in the saying it, he got pneumonia and died one month later. He never did a thing as president. However, he holds two presidential records. He has the record for the longest inaugural address in history. And, he has the record for the shortest term as president.

What it all amounts to is this: he talked more and did less than any other president.

Unless we're careful, our church can fall into the same trap. Today, the angel is bringing God's message to us as a church: it's time for us to get up and get going as an effective church.

And, that includes the field of evangelism. All of our hopes and plans, our dreams and our visions - the reasons we're here in this place instead of our old church building - the reasons we're struggling to put up the apartments and a new church campus --- the reason for all of that is to be more effective in winning people to a faith in Jesus Christ.

That's what we're doing it for. We're doing it to win people to Christ. That leaves you and me as the agents of evangelism. We've got to be warm and friendly. We've got to go out and extend an invitation to bring people in. We've got to be good witnesses to a Christian life so that other people will want to join us.

Statistics tell us that at least forty per cent of the people around us are not related to any church. The fields out there are ripe for the harvest. It's time we all got up and got going in the area of evangelism. When we do that, we will make 2005 the year the Church at Shawnee Landing grows by leaps and bounds. The only limit is your willingness to do it.

The angel comes with another message from the Lord: get up and get going in the area of stewardship.

Many of us are satisfied with our level of giving to the church and to charity. Many of us give sacrificial and generously. But the fact remains: we fall below our potential for faithful Christian stewardship.

The angel message is still the same: the Biblical pattern of the tithe is still true. That's what God wants. If an angel were to stand in front of us right now, surely his message would be: "in your personal giving, get up and get going to at least a tithe of your resources."

Stewardship isn't just giving money to the church. It's also giving your time and talents to the church and to the community. As good Christian people, we all ought to find a way to put our faith into action.

For you, that might mean taking on some specific task here in the church. It might mean becoming involved in some political campaigns, or volunteer service in the community. Our duty as Christians is still defined by that voice which keeps on saying: "get up and get going."

It's time for us all to get excited about our building plans for our church.

The vision of our church campus,

- with an inspiring center for worship and fellowship and education,
  - with affordable and beautiful apartments so that other people can live in comfort and security,
  - with a center to care for the community's children while parents are at work,
  - with a wholesome place for exercise and enjoyment.
- all of this is truly exciting.

The question is: what can you do to make our vision and our plans a reality?

Individually and as a church fellowship, our worst problem is not failure, nor even the possibility of failure. Our worst problem is lethargy, it's being comfortable with the way things are, it's an unwillingness to set high goals for ourselves.

The sky is the limit for our church. We have people and resources. We have vision and plans. We have opportunities and ideas. But, we won't achieve a thing sitting down. It's time to get up and get going.

A young minister, fresh out of seminary, went to serve a small church in a little town. His reception there was not encouraging.

Person after person told him that his little church was dead. They said it had no hope of revival. After a few weeks of depressing news and depressing worship, it occurred to him that since the church was dead, the only decent thing to do was to bury it.

He announced a funeral for the church, set the time, and invited all the church members and people from the community to come pay their last respects. When the people entered, they saw a casket up front. The lid was raised on it.

The service was held. It was a regular funeral service. At the end, the minister invited the people to come down front and file by the casket, to view the remains of the dead church. As the people did so and looked in the casket, they probably expected to see some picture of the church back in it's glory years. Instead, they saw a mirror.

In the place where the dead church was supposed to be, they saw a reflection of themselves.

If we want our church to be alive and vigorous,

- if we want our church to grow and flourish,
- if we want our church to save and witness,
- we have to be all those things ourselves.

Our church is always a reflection of the people we are. We will never have a renewed church without renewed people.

The message God is sending his angels to give to us this morning is the very same message that has gone down through all the centuries.

It says to us individually  
and as a congregation:  
“get up and get going.”